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ABSTRACT

College seniors constitute a pre-transitional population that may be struggling with issues of adapting to anticipated change while preparing to leave the college environment. In order to assess the relationship of students' gender and their views of women's roles to the stresses arising from the transition anticipated at college graduation, male and female university seniors (N=114) completed the Mooney Problem Check List, the Attitudes toward Women Scale, and a Personal Data Form at the end of the fall semester. The Mooney Problem Check List was readministered at the beginning of the spring semester. Data analysis indicated that women reported significantly more problems than men, although, for both women and men, there was a significant decrease in reported problems from fall to spring. Both men and women expressed concern about social skills and friendship. For males, adjusting to college work was the most frequently reported problem area. Gender and academic pressure were the most influential variables. The results indicate that students should be encouraged to address career questions relating to the graduation transition early in their college careers in order to ease some of the related distress. (Author/AG)

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REPORTED STRESS of COLLEGE SENIORS as a FUNCTION
of GENDER and SEX ROLE ORIENTATION

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REPORTED STRESS of COLLEGE SENIORS AS A FUNCTION of GENDER and ~~SEX~~
ROLE ORIENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Reported stresses related to the anticipated transition of college graduation were studied, with particular emphasis on students' gender and views of women's roles. The Mooney Problem Check List, Attitudes Toward Women Scale, and a Personal Data Form were administered to 114 college seniors using a semi-longitudinal design. Analyses of variance and covariance and intercorrelations revealed that women reported significantly more problems than men. This is consistent with the trend that women, in general, are more willing than men to report distress. Both men and women expressed concern about friendship and social skills and activities, while there was a significant decrease from Fall to Spring in reported problems: Gender and academic pressure were the most significant variables studied. Most other measures were insignificant by comparison.

REPORTED STRESS of COLLEGE SENIORS AS A FUNCTION of GENDER and
SEX ROLE ORIENTATION

The four years of college serve as the cornerstone of adulthood (Erikson 1980; Manaster 1977). They provide a framework within which students can shed adolescent roles and develop adult responsibilities, such as making future and career choices, developing intimacy, becoming autonomous, and solidifying identity (Chickering, 1974). Such transitions from one life stage to the next necessitate, by definition, adaptation and change; stress is also a by-product (Chiriboga and Dean, 1978; Dohrenwend, 1973; Schlossberg, 1978).

Clearly, college seniors constitute a pre-transitional population that may be struggling with issues of adapting to anticipated change while preparing to leave the college environment. While there is ample literature addressing college development (Chickering, 1974; Erikson, 1980; Manaster, 1977) and a growing literature concerned with life crises and transitions (Chiriboga & Dean, 1978; Dohrenwend, 1973; Schlossberg, 1978), there is little information on the transition of leaving college. This is a crucial stage that all college students experience, yet a theoretical and research documentation of it is lacking.

This study focused on the reported stresses related to the anticipated transition of college graduation for senior students at the University of Pennsylvania, particularly in relation to the students' gender and views of women's roles.

Based upon a pilot study and a review of relevant literature (Beit-Hallahmi, 1972; Ginsberg, 1980; Karr & Mahrer, 1972; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1975) it was expected that the number and types of problems reported would be a function of the students' stage of career planning and views of women's roles in society. Further, it was anticipated that fears of the unknown, leaving friends, and present academic pressures would be significant sources of stress.

METHOD

A random sample of 114 graduating seniors at the University of Pennsylvania (62 women and 52 men) participated in this study. They were surveyed at the end of the Fall Semester using the Mooney Problem Check List (MCPL) to assess reported problems within eleven common areas, The Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS) to measure their attitudes to the roles of women in this society, and a Personal Data Form to collect demographic information. The MPCL was readministered at the beginning of the Spring semester for purposes of measuring changes in reported problems from the Fall to the Spring.

Data were analyzed by an analysis of variance to determine the significance of gender and time of the year in the variation of the MPCL scores. Intercorrelations between scores on the MCPL, AWS and continuous demographic variables were also calculated, as was an analysis of variance on the categorical demographic variables and MPCL scores. An analysis of covariance was performed to compare Fall and Spring MPCL score changes by gender. Rhos were computed for the purpose of prioritizing reported problems for males and females in the Fall and Spring.

RESULTS

Women reported more problems than men on all MPCL subscales in the Fall and on 10 of the 11 subscales in the Spring. During the Fall, the mean number of problems checked by the female subjects was 61.12 and by the male subjects was 49.33. In the Spring the female mean was 49.07 and the male mean was 39.73, a difference of about one-third of one standard deviation.

For all subjects, most problems were reported on the MPCL subscale of Social and Recreational activities. For the males, adjusting to college work was the next most frequently reported problem area, and this too was consistent from the Fall to the Spring semesters. The women in the sample were less predictable from Fall to Spring, ranking adjusting to college work as the second most troublesome area in the Fall and the Future: Vocational and Educational as second in the Spring.

According to AWS scores, female subjects were more nontraditional than their male counterparts, and father's occupation and grade point average were related to reported problems. However, neither attitudes toward women nor other demographic variables proved to be significantly related to stress.

DISCUSSION

The gender difference in numbers of reported problems is consistent with the trend that women, in general, are more willing than men to report distress. However, both women and men expressed concern about friendship and social skills and activities.

Consistent with the high level of academic pressure and preprofessionalism at the University of Pennsylvania was the preoccupation with school work and time management. This may account, in part, for the decrease in reported problems from Fall to Spring as academic demands tend to lessen for seniors.

Gender and academic pressure were the most influential variables studied. Most other measures proved to be insignificant by comparison. Social and academic forces at Penn may overshadow more subtle influences.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

College seniors preparing to graduate are faced with many changes. For some this is a time of stress. Since many of the needs of the college senior have not been specifically met, it is recommended that campus resources address themselves to the needs of this transitional population. In particular, research on transitions (Schlossberg, 1978) has shown that preparation for a change can ease some of the stress and enhance adaptation. Therefore, a focus on this research and on preparation would be important to impart to students. Students should be encouraged to address future and career questions relating to the graduation transition early on in their college careers. This would be facilitated through a graduation orientation focusing on such issues as separating from family and friends, finding jobs, and making lifestyle decisions. This ounce of prevention might ease some of the inevitable stress.

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